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Webster sworn in as director of CIA

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LANGLEY, Va. -- FBI Director William H. Webster, pledging to carry out covert assignments around the globe with "fidelity to the Constitution," was sworn in yesterday as the new head of the Central Intelligence Agency.

President Reagan, in brief remarks in which he praised the CIA and its intelligence role, declared that the United States "cannot survive . . . without a vigorous intelligence agency capable of acting swiftly and in secret."

The president said Mr. Webster -- a former prosecutor and federal appellate court judge -- was "stepping up to the leadership of an institution that by its very nature is a likely subject of controversy. Yet it is also irreplaceable."

"So long as I am president, I will never consent to see our intelligence capability undermined," Mr. Reagan told an audience of hundreds of intelligence experts and CIA employees at a ceremony beneath overcast skies on the lawn of agency headquarters here.

Mr. Webster, 63, ending nine

years as the director of the FBI, said it was "difficult . . . to leave the Department of Justice after so many years."

He pledged to work closely with Congress and to follow the letter of the law in carrying out CIA's covert operations.

"We will work with the congressional committees which must act in secret matters as surrogates for the Congress and the American people, and we will be worthy of their trust," he said.

Mr. Webster said that the CIA "will diligently carry out our assignments around the world, however difficult, with fidelity to the Constitution and the laws of our beloved country, so help us God."

He added a salute to the numerous officials whom he called the "unseen soldiers of democracy," who remained indoors to protect their anonymity, listening to the ceremony on an audio speaker.

Mr. Webster took the helm of the CIA from intelligence veteran Robert M. Gates, who had been acting CIA director since February, when William J. Casey resigned after undergoing surgery to remove a brain tumor. Mr. Casey died earlier this

month.

Mr. Gates, who at one point was nominated by the president to succeed Mr. Casey, withdrew his name from consideration amid questions about CIA involvement in the Iran-contra affair, which has strained relations with Congress.

Mr. Webster, who is recognized for having restored public confidence in the FBI, is widely respected. After prolonged hearings, he was confirmed May 19 by the Senate in a 94-1 vote.

His confirmation hearings, initially expected to be swift and glitch-free, ran into brief difficulty when it was disclosed that he had been told as early as last Oct. 30 that Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, the fired National Security Council aide, could be targeted in a criminal probe because of his role in assisting the Nicaraguan contra rebels.

In testimony, Mr. Webster also disclosed that he had been told Colonel North had warned the FBI that an investigation it had initiated into the activities of Southern Air Transport could thwart secret negotiations aimed at gaining the release of U.S. hostages in Lebanon.